February 20, 2004

Public Notice for 401 Certification

Russian River Summer Crossings
Sonoma County

On November 5, 2003 the Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received two separate applications from Ms. Alynn Woodriff, on behalf of the Sonoma County Department of Public Transportation and Public Works (DTPW), requesting a Water Quality Certification and/or Waste Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects) for the installation and removal of the temporary summer crossings across the Russian River at the town of Asti and three in the area of Guerneville. The application was deemed complete on December 5, 2003. The proposed project causes disturbances to waters of the state associated with the Russian River Hydrologic Unit No. 114.00.

The lower Russian River summer crossings are located at Odd Fellows Road at Korbel, Summer Crossing Road at Guernewood Park, and Vacation Beach Avenue at Vacation Beach, Guerneville, Sonoma County, California. The upper summer crossing is at Washington School Road at Asti. In the past the lower crossings have been in place from mid-May until mid-October of each year, and the Asti crossing has been in place from mid-May until mid-November. Historically, each crossing has had a similar design. A portion of the stream channel is constructed with either removable steel deck panels on concrete piers, or a permanent bridge structure, while the majority of the crossing is built from compacted local fill material (mostly dirt with some river gravel). The purpose of the summer crossings is to provide relief from the traffic congestion associated with summer tourism, and to provide emergency services with better access and faster response times to areas on either side of the river.

The construction of the summer crossings, as they have been built in the past, results in significant impacts to water quality in the form of large sediment discharges into the river. In the past, when dirt and gravel fill was used, a large sediment load would be pushed into the channel. The Russian River is listed as impaired for sediment, and provides habitat for three listed salmonids. Therefore, for the 2003 season the Regional Water Board, the Army Corps of Engineers, California Department of Fish and Game, and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) required changes to the way the crossings are constructed. These changes included the use of washed gravels and geo-textile filter fabric at the lower crossings, and screened gravel at the Asti crossing. The washed gravel for the lower crossings originated from crushed quarry rock rather than washed river-run gravel, due to a lack of adequate supply of river-run gravel in the local area. While the use of clean washed /screened gravels appeared to significantly reduce turbid discharges associated with construction of the crossings, the crushed quarry rock still had more fines associated with it than would be expected with washed river-run gravels. The project proposal outlines the use of gravel that is at least 0.25 inches or greater in diameter at the Asti Crossing and 0.5 inches or greater at the three lower crossings, in areas of flowing water.

Based on the overall success in reducing turbidity discharges during last year's installations, the DTPW is proposing to implement the same measures that were used last season. However, the DTPW is requesting that the requirement for using geo-textile filter fabric between the clean gravels and the road base, be eliminated from future permits based on findings that the fabric provided no additional protection from turbidity impacts and only added expense and time to the project. According to the DTPW the clean gravel is highly compacted when the native material is placed on top of it, and there is only a slight chance of native material filtering into the clean gravels.

It is proposed, for the lower crossings, that the steel deck panels will be used as they have been in the past, but the base of each crossing will be built of clean river-run gravel instead of local dirt. Heavy equipment will slowly push the gravel into the water until the gravel base extends across the river. The base will be built to a height of at least two feet above the water level at the time of construction. The rest of the crossing will be constructed of the stockpiled dirt and gravel material that has been used in the past.

In addition, it is proposed that the lower crossings will be removed by gradually skimming the dirt layer off of the underlying clean gravel base and pushing it up the dry bank into the stockpile area (which is outside the ordinary high water area). The clean gravel that is above the water will also be skimmed off, as much as feasible, while the rest of the gravel will be left in the water. When winter flows increase, the remaining clean gravel in the channel will be redistributed along the river bottom. The permit conditions will likely require the use of 0.25-inch minimum and 0.5 inch minimum gravels for the Asti and three lower crossings, respectively. These size criteria will help ensure that the discharge of materials used for the crossings will not impact beneficial uses. Additional permit conditions will require that the fine sediment used for the road base be removed at the end of the season and that protective measures be installed to protect against its discharge during roadway use. To prevent further sedimentation of the river due to erosion, erosion and sediment control measures will be implemented along the bank where heavy equipment has been operated.

It is proposed that the Asti crossing will be built similarly to the way it was constructed during the 2003 summer season. Except that gravel for the base of the temporary crossing will be obtained from several gravel bars in the vicinity of the Asti crossing rather than using imported gravel. Conditions will require that this material is clean of fine sediment and meets the size criteria for discharge into the River. Due to the way the river meanders in this area, there are several options for constructing the crossing. If the river is flowing in the Eastern portion of the channel, a gravel roadway will be built from the West side of the river until it meets up with the 60 foot long, two-span temporary bridge. If the river is flowing in the Western portion of the channel, a 100-foot Bailey bridge will be used to span the active channel, and the gravel crossing will be built from the eastern bank. It is also possible that both of these methods will need to be employed.

The construction schedule proposed for the crossings will follow the same timelines as during the 2003 summer season. Placement of gravel within the flowing channel of the Russian River will not occur before June 15, and removal will occur no later than October 15. However, in the case of Asti the removal date is proposed for November 1 in order to accommodate the needs of

the California Department of Forestry to have better access during fire season. The dates have been changed from their historic times in order to minimize impacts to listed salmonids.

Consulting agencies for this project include the California Department of Fish and Game, the United States Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). On June 11, 2003, NOAA Fisheries issued a Biological Opinion for the proposed project based on review of the proposed ACOE Clean Water Act Section 404 permit, and its effects on threatened Central California Coast coho salmon, threatened California Coastal Chinook salmon and threatened Central California Coast steelhead, and designated critical habitat for Central California Coast coho salmon in accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. On June 16, 2003, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued a Clean Water Act Section 404 Permit for the proposed project (File No. 273010N).

The DTPW, as the lead California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) agency, has determined that this project qualifies for a Mitigated Negative Declaration pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which was adopted by the County of Sonoma on February 25, 2003.

The nearest receiving water is the Russian River Hydrologic Unit No. 114.00.

At this time the Regional Water Quality Control Board is in the process of reviewing the proposed project regarding the issuance of the 401 Certification Permit. In addition, the Regional Water Quality Control Board will consider all comments received during a 21-day comment period that begins on the first date of issuance of this letter. If you have any questions or comments, please contact staff member Andrew Jensen by email at Jensa@rb1.swrcb.ca.gov or send comments to Regional Water Quality Control Board, 5550 Skylane Boulevard, Suite A, Santa Rosa, CA 95403.